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Summer 1996

Maine Speakout Communique, Vol.1, No.3 (Summer 1996)

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Maine Speakout Project

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MAINE SPEAKOUT COMMUNIQUE

Vol. 1, No. 3



Summer 1996

Recent Speaking Invitations

Our invitations to speak keep growing. Here are our spring and summer engagements for this year (so far!).

May 8, Westbrook Rotary, American Legion Bldg., Westbrook, 12 noon; Speakers: Paula Clearwater and Michael Bendzela

May 14, Clergy group, United Methodist Church, Old Orchard Beach, 9:30am; Speakers: Tom Cathcart and Grace Bartlett

May 20, Business and Professional Women of Waterville, Fleet Bank, Waterville, 6:30pm; Speakers: Bill Gordon and Judy Harrison

May 22, Standish Kiwanis Club, 6:30pm; Speakers: Madeleine Winter and Mike Bendzela

May 23, Clergy group, Woodford's Church, Portland, 12 noon; Speakers: Gracia Woodward and Richard Waitzkin

June 2, UU Church, Norway, 11am; Speakers: Michael Bendzela and Madeleine Winter

June 18, Caribou Historical Society, Caribou, 7:30pm; Speakers: Dick Harrison and Cindy Hebert

July 10, Lewiston/Auburn Kiwanis, Ramada Inn, Lewiston, 12 noon; Speakers: Esther Turner and Bob Woods

What's Happening Out There?

We're asking speakers to write short summaries of their speaking experiences. Reading about your experiences is helpful to both those who have spoken and those who are considering doing it. Please send your contributions to Madeleine Winter, 51 Shore Rd., Standish, ME 04084.

Give My Regards To Westbrook

The Rotary Club treats its speakers well. My co-speaker was Paula Clearwater, the date, Tuesday, May 7. The crowd was generally older businessmen, a scattering of women and younger guys. Of course, I was nervous as hell, but our host, Arthur Gagne, put us immediately at ease. They treated us to a full lunch, and by the time I wolfed down the steaming hot bread pudding I was ready to go to bed. Then, believe it or not, we sung a little song, "Give My Regards To Broadway." I never expected such a "formal" kind of event; Arthur gave us each a full introduction, and we got up individually to speak from the podium. The crowd gave Paula their rapt attention, understandable given her moving story and her engaging demeanor. I don't remember much of my own

speech, it was like swimming underwater. Afterward there were few questions. One gentleman spoke about how he got the nerve one day to ask his sister-in-law if she was a lesbian (answer: affirmative); a lawyer in the audience corrected me on some of the niceties of the defeated referendum; another man wanted to know about the images on television of San Francisco's pride march. I asked him to imagine what it would be like if heterosexuals were judged solely upon their behavior at Mardi Gras in New Orleans. It was over quickly, and I went home and took a nap.

Mike Bendzela
Standish

☸☸☸



Casco Bay Sunrise Rotary Club

In March Elliott Cherry and I spoke to the Casco Bay Sunrise Rotary Club. The group was polite and friendly, and I learned a couple of things. First, I learned from Elliott that a good way to deal with an argument from an audience member is to simply say, "Has anyone else had a different experience?" Someone else had and spoke up eloquently. A second thing I learned is that one shouldn't make the assumption that the audience is made up of only straight people. We'd been told that in the training, but that didn't stop me. Talking afterwards with a lesbian-Rotarian did.

Tom Cathcart
Portland



Matlovich Society, Portland, May 9th

On a lovely spring evening in May, my co-speaker, Elliott Cherry and I, gave a demonstration speakout for the Matlovich Society. It proved to be the perfect situation for me to have my first speaking experience since my training; could anyone ask for a friendlier, more supportive audience than the Matlovich members? I spoke first, then Elliott and I felt that our speaking order and roles (me as mother of a gay son and Elliott as a young gay man) worked well. Afterwards, we were flooded with questions and I was pleased that the "hook" in my talk did indeed provoke the first question to me: "what did you do about your dilemma at that party?" The audience seemed very interested in how both Elliott and I handle situations we meet in our daily lives and even helpfully suggested several possibilities to me. When the demonstration was over I was very touched that so many came up to talk to me, saying such things as "Will you adopt me - I'd like you for a mother" and "Does your son know how lucky he is?" One man noted how touched he was when, during the question period, he had mentioned that his mother had never stopped hoping that someday he'd meet the right woman and I had said "I only wish that my son, Ben, would meet the right guy." Despite my initial nervousness, I really enjoyed the whole evening and hope that I can speak again, knowing of course, that not all audiences will be as sympathetic as this one. Elliott and I both felt that one of the best aids to

our talk was Naomi, sitting in the front row nodding in approval at every sentence we said. We walked out of the Holiday Inn with a man who said that he was now interested in training and speaking for Speakout - a gratifying result of the evening!

Gerry Clement
Falmouth



All Things Considered...

Four years after moving to Maine, it was strange enough to be describing my lesbian relationship to a couple dozen old men, let alone broadcasting to the entire state. Living way out in the country as I do, my whole life is more shrouded than I've been used to. And "coming out" to neighbors isn't easy when coaxing any conversation feels like a minor victory. So, the Speakout Project is personally a way for me to interface with the community I live in, and to "come out" to my neighbors.

In the first hour of the training a few weekends before, Charlotte Renner from Maine Public Radio introduced herself saying that she'd like to follow one of us from the training to our first speaking engagement. She thought the project was an excellent one in which to trace the process of developing and telling one's story. I volunteered to let her tape my first Speakout at the Kiwanis Club of Westbrook.

The meeting was held at Valle's Steak House, and included a free lunch. I decided to dress up for the occasion because I wanted to portray respectful appreciation for the attention, and also because I don't get many chances to get out of the flannel shirt and jeans.

The experience turned out as I'd expected. I was nervous telling my story... grateful for the small contingent who were also visiting as members of a key club. The telling of our stories went well. Mine was a very personal one about how I came out, met my partner and happened to move to Maine (all in under 10 minutes). My co-speaker dealt with a friend's experience of harassment (someone who wasn't even gay being harassed for being gay). It was a bit difficult to coax questions in the short time we had left, but I wasn't surprised by this. After all, I figure that most of these men probably don't talk openly to women they don't know very often. They most likely don't talk about sexuality much, and they very likely



don't venture into discourse about lesbian sex at the drop of a hat. So all things considered, I was satisfied that they listened to us, that they were shocked by stories of discrimination, and that they thanked us warmly for our courage and integrity. The few questions that arose seemed genuine, and I knew that we had left them with more internal ones that would coax some inner dialogue, even if the external was not forthcoming.

And I was happy with Charlotte's "Maine Things Considered" broadcast a few days later. I caught only the last half of it in which she was interviewing me about my experience after the speech. Like me, she had viewed it as a successful and meaningful experience. She had worried about the effect of the presence of her microphone as I had been concerned about the effect of the power of my story. But as I sat in my kitchen, listening to my voice on the radio speaking my truth, I felt less isolated, more powerful, and more a part of Maine.

Paula Clearwater
West Baldwin



"Flood Tide" Strikes Norway, Maine

We found ourselves in a simple antique Universalist church that had been decorated by children in a delightful rainforest motif—green paper canopy, inflatable blue parrots on the podium, frogs on the microphone. (We Sunday school kids never got to do this in our Catholic parish!) Our contact person, Nancy Wood, gave a reading that went right to the heart, and Reverend

Joy Gasta's homily was amazingly contrary to what one might normally expect at church, particularly if one was raised Catholic. The theme "When a just cause reaches it's flood tide...what ever stands in the way must fall before it's overwhelming power." I began to get the feeling: We're not in the Rotary club anymore." It must have been that phrase "flood tide" that did it. Angry because of this same-sex union controversy suddenly coming out of nowhere, I had written my speech in one cranky session the night before without a clue as to it's emotional impact on me. I began my talk by thanking them for the blue parrots, ("Use humor") then everything spiraled out of control from there. If you've ever traveled down the highway at a good clip only to have all four tires blow out at once, then you know what it's like. I tried all the recommended techniques - breathing, looking out at the audience, looking at the blue parrots - but nothing helped, and I began to sound as if I were speaking in broken Yiddish. Afterward, everyone assured me that I had made the necessary "connection," but then everyone usually claps politely when a juggler drops his balls, too. Because of its emotional impact, I think all of you speakers out there should have the experience of "speaking out" at a church, but I recommend bringing an oxygen tank with you.

Mike Bendzela
Standish



Coordinator's Update

Reaching Out to Churches: We've begun offering "demonstration Speakouts" to various groups of clergy, with the hope that after they see and hear what we do, they'll become interested in scheduling a Speakout dialogue in the near future. Recently, we made three such presentations: to the York County United Church of Christ Clergy Association in Saco on May 1st, to the Southern Maine District of United Methodist clergy in Old Orchard Beach on May 14th and to the Cumberland County United Church of Christ clergy at Woodfords Church in Portland. At the end of each presentation, I've left with the names and phone numbers of interested

ministers which I passed on to the appropriate MSOP county group for future action.

The Religious Coalition Against Discrimination (RCAD), a group of clergy and laity committed to educating about discrimination in their denominations, has asked two of its members to serve as liaisons to MSOP. They are Stacy Parady and Tom Cathcart, both of Portland. One of their first initiatives is to send out a letter to a number of churches encouraging they work with Speakout in the coming year. Signed by RCAD's co-chairs, Rev. Marvin Ellison and Tom Ewell, executive director of the Maine Council of Churches, this letter will be



mailed in mid-June and MSOP venues-people will then make the follow-up phone calls seeking invitations.

MSOP in the counties: After our recent May trainings in Ellsworth (Hancock County) and Eliot (York County) we have about 130 persons trained to speak. We've stopped calling MSOP county groups "committees" because the negative connotations of the word has had a chilling effect on our efforts to encourage people to get involved in carrying out limited and specific tasks to develop and sustain MSOP locally. So our new strategy: No more committees, only county groups with finite tasks!

Summer Outreach: Summer need not mean the end of all MSOP activities. While speakouts will be infrequent, this is a good time to let people know about the project. Why not organize an event this summer to bring together a group of 20-30 people and tell them about Speakout? We're encouraging each county group to organize one such event by Labor Day. They could be picnics, dessert and coffee gatherings, barbecues, etc. If 2-6 people co-sponsor an event together, each inviting her/his list of friends and since these are not fundraisers, it should be relatively easy to get a good turnout. A few MSOP participants can talk about the project or you could have a "demonstration Speakout" to give your guests an example of what we do. (We'll help you organize it.)

Fundraising: Many thanks to the sponsors and musicians who participated in our May 10th French Baroque Chamber Music Concert to benefit MSOP in Portland. Sponsored by Kathy & Chuck Rimmel, Ann & Charlie Harriman, Anita Jones and Mare & Laurie Wallace, the event was great: a beautiful concert, 50 new donors for MSOP and \$2,300 raised to support our work. Special thanks to Elliott Cherry, MSOP volunteer extraordinaire, and his co-musicians: Christina Astrachan, Anthony Allen, Ray Cornils and Mary Jo Carlson. While we all know a good musician is hard to find, if you know any, you might see if they'd like to perform to benefit MSOP. It doesn't hurt to ask!

Recent Grants: \$5,000 from the Gill Foundation, Colorado Springs, CO and \$5,000 from the Kenduskeag Foundation, Portland, ME. We've raised \$37,500 in 1996 and still need \$43,500 to reach our budget of \$81,000.

MSOP in the Mail: Last week we sent our first mail appeal to about 2,000 people. They received a

letter signed by the co-chairs of "Speakout 96," Mary Herman and Buzz Fitzgerald. Mary and her husband, Angus King, have been outspoken proponents of equal rights, as has Buzz Fitzgerald, former CEO at Bath Iron Works.

Here are two short paragraphs from their letter:

Our recent experience with Question One is an episode in a longer - and continuing - history of struggle to eradicate prejudice and discrimination in our state.

We believe that the best way to defuse the fear and ignorance that breeds scapegoating is through direct, face-to-face encounters of the kind being sponsored by the Maine Speakout Project for Equal Rights.

Thanks to Mary & Buzz for their support and to Naomi Falcone, Janis Tyderle, and Madeleine Winter for doing the stuffing and sorting.

MSOP Leadership Council: I am very pleased to announce the formation of a Leadership Council whose members are committing time and energy to help ensure the success of MSOP. This group will provide oversight, strategic planning, and fundraising assistance to the project. Its members are Sue Comyns, Rev. Calvin Dame, Mark Dion, Ann Donaghy, Tom Ewell, Susan Farnsworth, Mary Herman, Matt Howe, Naomi King, Mike Klaus, Robin Lambert, Janie Matrisciano, Marian McCue, Jessica Maurer, Eileen Monahan, Pat Peard, Kathy and Chuck Rimmel, Deb Rice, Neil Rolde, Pat Ryan, Cobie Smith and Alan Stearns.

Summer Reading: I've just finished *A Place At the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society* by Bruce Bawer (\$12, Simon & Schuster Touchstone paperback) and found it both excellent and very relevant to what we're trying to do with MSOP. Thanks to Mike Klaus for recommending it to me.

MSOP in Portland Pride: Please join us in walking behind the MSOP banner on Saturday, June 15. We'll meet at 10:30am at City Hall in Portland. After the march and rally, come take a turn at our table in Deering Oaks Park where we'll be presenting an MSOP puppet show. For more information, call Elliott Cherry at 772-2442.



This space is always available for reports from any county group. Reports can be sent anytime and will appear in the next edition of the newsletter.

Cumberland County News

The Cumberland County Chapter of Maine Speakout met May 23 to discuss recent speaking engagements and to make plans for the summer and fall. The three major areas for planning are membership, venues and fundraising. There are many, many ways for you to become involved with MSOP - even if you don't feel comfortable with public speaking. Most of these activities take very little time, they are a great way to meet new people, and they move us all one step closer to ending discrimination.

Membership: In preparation for a fall training, we are finding ways to spread the word of how involvement with MSOP is vital to the end of prejudice and discrimination, while providing self-rewarding growth for dealing with daily interactions. Besides speakers, we need people interested in organizing engagements, fundraising and many other tasks

At Portland Pride festivities on June 15, Maine Speakout will have a table to distribute information about our program. Volunteers are needed to be at the table for an hour or two. You'll just need to answer questions about the project and share some of your own experiences. Members interested in "speaking out" for us at Portland Pride should call Elliott Cherry at 772-2442. Thanks, Elliott for organizing this for us !!

Another membership activity is being planned for both existing and potential members for later this summer. One idea is to have a bonfire (hot dogs and marshmallows???) out near Lake Sebago. Details have yet to be decided, but if you are a party planner and can help out, call Paula Clearwater at 625-7086.

Venues: Finding audiences for our speakers has depended mostly on service organizations. With summer arriving, these organizations don't meet often

and we are making a renewed emphasis on churches and employers. If you think your employer would support a lunch time Speakout, call the Speakout office to let us know (879-0480). Jonathan Lee has done great foundation building with many churches - we now need to take some specific actions.

If you would like to see Maine Speakout get its message out to more and more people in Maine, there are some simple steps you can take to make a big difference. A group of Cumberland County members will be meeting on June 17 at 6:30 at the Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Organization (92 Congress Street). You can show up and learn how your help will get our messages out.

Chris Milliken is interested in organizing a house party to develop new leads for speaking engagements. This sounds like a fun way to get new venues. Interested in helping Chris? Call him at 883-4882.

Fundraising: We are planning a summer event that will bring us funding to keep us going. This event will need several volunteers to help with mailings, presentations at the event about their speakout experiences, and probably some general "legwork" and help on the day of the event. If you want to put in a few hours to help the organization along, give Jessica Maurer a call at 773-0362.

The Cumberland County Chapter will meet again on July 10 at 7:00 pm at the YWCA on Spring Street, Portland. This is an important meeting to find out the progress the organization is making as it develops into the strongest, most inclusive and most respected group working to end discrimination. We have already made ground-breaking strides in gaining attention and respect in the media - come and join us in our educational adventure. Wednesday, July 10, 7:00 pm at the YWCA.

BECAUSE IF WE DO NOT SPEAK OUT, WHO WILL???

JUNE 15	PORTLAND PRIDE	Call Elliott, 772-2442
JUNE 17	ENGAGEMENT IDEAS	Meet on Munjoy Hill
JULY 10	COUNTY CHAPTER MEETING	Meet at YWCA
Summertime	FUNDRAISING EVENT	Call Jessica, 773-0362
Late summer	MEMBERSHIP PARTY	Call Paula, 625-0786



Same Gender Marriage Information Available

With increasing frequency, we are getting asked questions about same gender marriage at our Speakout dialogs. To help our speakers to prepare for these questions, Speakout has several publications available that have been provided to us courtesy of GLAD. Due to duplication and mailing costs, we are asking for \$2 for each information packet. They may be obtained by sending a check or money order to Maine Speakout, 123 Congress St., #1, Portland, ME 04101.

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Speakers Needed for Healthcare Forum

Speakers needed Thursday, October 17, 8-9am, to talk about any experiences interacting with the health care system either as a gay or lesbian client, or gay/lesbian health care provider. Speakers would be part of a 3 or 4 person panel addressing the City of Portland's Public Health Division. For more information call Chris Chenard at 773-2229 (h) or 874-8977 (w).



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Upcoming meetings/events...

Cumberland County Venues Committee mtg. 6/17 at 6:30pm, Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Org., 92 Congress St., Portland.

For everyone who has been wishing they could observe a Speakout engagement, this is your chance... On 7/10, 7pm at the YWCA, there will be a demo Speakout to be followed by a Cumberland County Group meeting. All welcome.

THE FABULOUS SPEAKOUT CROSSWORD PUZZLE SOLUTION

